

CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 17, 2023 • WEEK 19



JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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Verse of the Week

Genesis 49:33

When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

How Can We Face Death?



THE NOVELIST SOMERSET MAUGHAM SAID, “Death is a very dull, dreary affair, and my advice to you is to have nothing whatsoever to do with it.”¹ Death is a subject most people would rather not think about. In light of that, it may seem odd that Winston Churchill planned his own funeral. It included many of the great hymns of the church and used the eloquent Anglican liturgy. At his direction, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of St. Paul’s Cathedral, played “Taps,” the universal signal that day is done. But then came the most dramatic turn. As Churchill had instructed, as soon as “Taps” was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the great dome, played “Reveille”: “It’s time to get up, it’s time to get up, it’s time to get up in the morning.”² We don’t know if Churchill was a true believer in Jesus Christ, but by following “Taps” with “Reveille,” he seemed to be testifying that death is not the final note in history. There will be that “great gittin’ up morning,” when the dead in Christ shall rise. When a loved one dies, there is the sorrow and grief of loss, but for the believer, there is also the hope of eternal life that overcomes the grief.

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INTRODUCTION

More space is given to the death of Jacob than probably the death of any other person in the Bible, except Jesus Christ. Moses' reason for this lengthy treatment seems to be to renew the covenant promises of God concerning the Promised Land. Although Jacob only possessed a small burial plot in Canaan, he wanted to be buried there rather than to stay in Egypt because God had promised Canaan to Abraham and his descendants. When Jacob died, his son Joseph grieved over his father but also had hope and faith in God's promises, as we see here in Jacob's burial in Canaan. From this account of Jacob's death and funeral, we see how believers should face the death of a loved one. We are also reminded of the importance of being prepared for our own death. God has a "Promised Land" for us, too.

**Though we grieve at the death of a loved one,
we have hope by faith in God's promises.**

I. IT IS PROPER TO GRIEVE AT THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

Genesis 49:29-33

Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. ³¹There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah—³²the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth." ³³When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

A. We Grieve Because Death is Our Enemy

Death is not a natural part of life, as some would have us believe. Death is our enemy! The curse of death came upon the entire human race when Adam and Eve sinned. Again and again, we read the phrase "and he died" as Moses gives the history of humanity (Genesis 5). Each man lived so many years, and he died. Nothing has changed since those early days of the world. Because we are all born sinners, we are all under the curse of death. "Through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). We are all going to die.

Jesus conquered death through His resurrection, in the sense of breaking its ultimate victory over believers, but that triumph will not be fully realized until He returns to give His children resurrection bodies like His own. At that time, Paul says that Jesus will "put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death" (1 Corinthians 15:25-26). It is not until the Apostle John sees the new heavens and new earth that he states, "and [God] will wipe away every tear from their



eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain” (Revelation 21:1, 4). Death is a painful reminder of the curse that came because of our sin. We grieve because death is our enemy, and we cannot defeat it in our own strength. But we can rejoice because one day death will be “swallowed up in victory!” “Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

B. We Grieve Because Death Separates Us from Loved Ones

Genesis 50:1-3

Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him and kissed him. ²Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. ³Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

Joseph was a godly man. His father’s death was not unexpected. Yet when Jacob died, Joseph fell on his father’s face and wept. His time with his father on this earth was done. Joseph lived for another 54 years. Undoubtedly, there were many times during those years that he longed to talk with his father about something, but he wasn’t there. For God’s child, it is true that “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Though there is comfort in that promise, it does not relieve all the pain for those who are left behind. The deceased person is absent, and a new “normal” must be established without that person in our lives. That difficult process takes time and is different for every person. The sense of loneliness, of missing the departed person, makes grief linger, often for years.

Joseph observed 70 days of mourning, plus seven more days after the funeral procession arrived at the borders of Canaan. Although it is possible to grieve excessively, there is no hint in the text that Joseph was unspiritual or excessive in his grief. The Bible teaches that grief is a proper human emotion and that tears are the normal response in grief. Jesus Christ entered Mary and Martha’s grief by weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33, 35). Not grieving does not make you more spiritual. It is right and proper to grieve when we lose loved ones in death. We grieve much because we love much.

Genesis 50:4-10

When the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, ⁵‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.’” ⁶Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.” ⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, ⁸and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. ⁹There also went up with him both





chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. ¹⁰When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father.

A funeral or memorial service can be a beneficial part of the grieving process for family and friends. It helps to give a sense of closure to the person's death. While we talk about paying our respects to the deceased person, funerals are really for the living, not for the dead. The huge funeral procession up to Canaan, with all of Pharaoh's court officials, wasn't for Jacob; it was for Joseph and his brothers. The Egyptians were showing their respect for Joseph by entering into his grief. The 70 days of mourning were just two days short of the time of mourning for a Pharaoh, which shows how highly Joseph was regarded. The Bible does not prescribe a certain method of burial, although the most common practice was to place the corpse in a cave or hewn out tomb. Joseph had his father embalmed in accordance with the Egyptian custom, at least partly so that he could transport his body to Canaan, as Jacob had made him swear.

II. THOUGH WE GRIEVE, WE HAVE HOPE BY FAITH IN GOD'S PROMISES

Genesis 49:33 tells us Jacob "breathed his last and was gathered to his people." While some believe that this phrase is just a Hebrew euphemism for death or for burial in the ancestral burial plot, it certainly can imply more. Jacob was not reunited with his ancestors when his body was carried into the cave of Machpelah, where their bodies lay. The moment he drew his last breath, his soul was gathered to their souls in heaven. Jacob's unwavering faith in God's promise of eternal life after death became reality.

A. We Must Exercise Hope in God's Promises by Faith

The author of Hebrews makes the point that the great men and women of faith pleased God with their trust, but they still died without receiving what they had been promised (Hebrews 11:39). God had promised Jacob the land of Canaan, and here he was, dying in Egypt, with no claim on Canaan except a burial plot. God had promised to make him a great nation, but he was only a company of 70 strong when he entered Egypt. Still, by faith, he blessed his sons and predicted their future as the 12 tribes of the nation Israel. By faith he made Joseph promise to take his body back to Canaan. He could have been buried in the finest of Egyptian tombs, but he chose to make a statement in his death about his resolute trust in what God had promised. "Bury me in the cave... in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 49:30).

But how do we know that our hope in God's promise of eternal life is not just wishful thinking? What if we die and there is nothing else? How do we know that our loved ones are in heaven and that we will be with them someday?



The Apostle Paul deals with all these questions. In 1 Corinthians 15 he argues that there is clear proof for the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and that His resurrection is the basis for the future resurrection of all those who have placed their faith in Him. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul again offers the resurrection of Jesus as the basis for our hope of being reunited with our deceased loved ones who have likewise placed their faith in Jesus for salvation from death and punishment.

1 Corinthians 15:17-22

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸Then those also who have fallen asleep [died] in Christ have perished. ¹⁹If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. ²⁰But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep [the first one to rise from the dead]. ²¹For since by a man [Adam] came death, by a man [Christ Jesus] also came the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 17-18

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.... ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Although Paul and many others give witness of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, we must exercise faith in God's promises when we are faced with death, simply because we ourselves have not gone beyond the grave and returned. Our Redeemer Jesus has, however, and we can take Him at His Word. When we do, He gives genuine hope in the face of our greatest enemy.

B. We Must Extend Our Hope to Those Who Are Without God and Have No Hope

Genesis 50:11-14

Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians." Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. ¹²Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; ¹³for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Both the Canaanites and the Egyptians observed Joseph during his grief. No doubt the Egyptians wondered why Jacob wanted to be buried in some cave in Canaan when he could have had a beautiful tomb in Egypt. James Boice observes, "If Joseph had not expressed grief over the death





of his beloved father, the Egyptians would have concluded merely that he had not cared for him, that perhaps he was even glad to have the old man out of the way. If he had expressed nothing but grief, the Egyptians may have concluded that the hope of an afterlife by these Semitic people was no better than their own dark hopes and may even have been inferior to theirs.”³ Most likely, Joseph used the occasion of the funeral and the trip back to Canaan to tell his Egyptian friends about his hope in the living God.

Death and funerals often provide opportunities to witness to those who otherwise put death and eternity out of their minds. We should always be sensitive, but also we must be bold in telling others of the hope of the gospel at such times.

Years ago, a pastor was asked to conduct the funeral for a man he did not know. Neither did he know the man’s family. A son, a daughter, and her husband came in to see the pastor before the funeral. After they talked a while, he said, “At a time like this, you probably would like to know what the Bible says about what happens after we die.” As the pastor talked about the gospel, they got upset and said, “Are you saying our dad is not in heaven?” The pastor had not said anything about their father. He replied, “I didn’t know your father, and I know nothing of what took place between him and God. I was simply telling you not what I think but what the Bible says about how a person can go to heaven. I thought that you would want to know that important information.”

Many people have a false hope for heaven. They think that God is loving and good, so He won’t judge sin or send anybody, except the very worst of sinners, to hell. They assume that living a good life will be enough for God to allow them into heaven. However, the Bible says:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all” (James 2:10).

“It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

The Gospel is the only hope for all of us.

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [payment] for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ...He was buried, and ...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him, shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).



CONCLUSION

If we are unsure of the salvation of the deceased, we can still rest in the confidence that God knows the hearts of every person. God says He “will certainly not cast out the one who comes to [Him]” (John 6:37). If there was ever a time when the deceased personally came to Jesus, repenting of sin and placing trust in Him alone for salvation, we can know that God has kept His promise and has given him or her eternal life.

What about you? Are you sure you will be in heaven when you die? If not, God wants you to be. He has made the way to heaven simple. Sin cannot come into heaven. It has to be punished. Jesus took the punishment for your sin when He died on the cross. Sin must be covered. Jesus wants to cover your sin with His righteousness (purity) so you can enter heaven and live forever with Him. Come to Jesus. Tell Him you are sorry for your sin. Tell Him you want Him to forgive and cover your sin. By faith, accept His gift of forgiveness and eternal life. Thank Him for making that possible when He died for you. Then live in such a way that no one will doubt that you are with Jesus when you die!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Arin Hess".

Arin Hess

Christ Our Hope in Life and Death

Keith Getty, Matt Boswell, Jordan Kauflin, Matt Merker, and Matt Papa

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone.
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to Him belong.
Who holds our days within His hand?
What comes apart from His command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand.

Chorus

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal;
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death!

What truth can calm the troubled soul?
God is good, God is good.
Where is His grace and goodness known?
In our great Redeemer's blood.
Who holds our faith when fears arise?
Who stands above the stormy trial?
Who sends the waves that bring us nigh
Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?



Theme Verse

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren,
whatever is **true**,
whatever is **honorable**,
whatever is **right**,
whatever is **pure**,
whatever is **lovely**,
whatever is of
good repute,
if there is any
excellence
and if anything is
worthy of praise,
dwell on these things.

Unto the grave what shall we sing?
“Christ, He lives; Christ, He lives!”
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with Him.
There we will rise to meet the Lord,
Then sin and death will be destroyed,
And we will feast in endless joy,
When Christ is ours forevermore!

Questions to Consider:

- Is it possible to be grieving deeply and yet be trusting God fully?
- What has helped you most and least when you were grieving? Why?
- What do you say to someone whose loved one has just died without assurance of knowing Christ? How do you share hope in that situation?

FOOTNOTES

1. Joseph Demakis, *The Ultimate Book of Quotations*, 2012, p. 72.
2. <https://maxlucado.com/listen/death-not-final-chapter/>
3. James Boice, W *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary*, Zondervan, 1986, Vol 2, p. 322.

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*.

Some of this material was gathered from Pastor Steven Cole's work, found at <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-83-grief-and-hope-genesis-4929-5014/>.



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